



NEWS RELEASE

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Congress Seeks comments on EQIP Interim Final Rule

Lakewood, CO – February 2, 2009 – The 2008 Farm Bill contains proposed changes to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the USDA's largest conservation program for working agricultural lands. The U. S. Department of Agriculture published an interim final rule for the program containing the statutory changes seeking public comment through March 16, 2009. Please visit

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008/index.html> for information about how to contribute comments regarding this and other 2008 Farm Bill program rules and regulations.

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, or 2008 Farm Bill, is authorized by Congress and governs federal farm and food policy, covering a wide range of programs, including commodity price and income support, farm credit, agricultural conservation, research, rural development, and foreign and domestic food programs, among others. Reauthorization of the Farm Bill occurs about every five years. The NRCS administers a number of programs within the Conservation Title of the Bill under which EQIP falls.

Proposed changes to the EQIP program includes non-industrial private forestland as an eligible land use and provides payments for conservation practices related to organic production or the transition to organic production. It also provides for increased payment rates to historically underserved producers, including limited resource, beginning, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

The public comments will be used to finalize the interim final rule. The USDA will publish a final rule, which will incorporate statutory changes and establish the program's policy for the life of the 2008 Farm Bill.

EQIP is a voluntary conservation program that provides technical assistance and payments to help crop and livestock producers address environmental concerns through conservation improvements on agricultural and non-industrial private forest lands. Farmers and ranchers can use EQIP to enhance farming in an environmentally friendly manner and still meet their agricultural production goals. It is designed to produce significant environmental benefits to the public, such as improved soil, water and air quality, and enhanced wildlife habitat. In addition, farmers and ranchers use EQIP to meet federal, state, tribal and local environmental regulations.

For additional information about EQIP, please visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/EQIP/>. For additional information about this release please contact Petra Barnes Walker at petra.barneswalker@co.usda.gov or call 720-544-2808.

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